

**From:** Celia Kent [mailto:[celia.kent@gmail.com](mailto:celia.kent@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Monday, April 12, 2010 9:53 PM  
**To:** Roland Bartl  
**Cc:** Sidewalk Committee  
**Subject:** Re: FW: Sidewalk Guidelines for Town of Acton - please let us know your thoughts.

Dear Roland,

I want to thank you for your earlier feedback on the sidewalk guidelines. I've responded to some of your comments below. The committee reviewed the various feedback we received and made adjustments which are reflected in the final version. We called it "version one" as we expect that the guidelines will be updated as we learn more or new issues arise. I've attached version one to this email fyi and it will also be posted on our web site. Please let us know if you have further thoughts or suggestions for when we're ready for version two! Celia

On Tue, Jan 19, 2010 at 6:11 PM, Celia Kent <[ckent@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ckent@fas.harvard.edu)> wrote:

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**From:** Roland Bartl [mailto:[rbartl@acton-ma.gov](mailto:rbartl@acton-ma.gov)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 19, 2010 3:29 PM  
**To:** Kate Chung; Commission on Disabilities; Conservation Commission; Design Review Board; Historic District Commission; Historical Commission; Planning Board; Recreation Commission; Transportation Advisory Committee; Community Preservation Committee  
**Cc:** Sidewalk Committee  
**Subject:** RE: Sidewalk Guidelines for Town of Acton - please let us know your thoughts.

Just a few observations, and you probably have thought about them all:

Planting Strip between street and sidewalk:

This is a highly stressed micro environment (small narrow area for water infiltration; compaction from cars driving over it/people walking on it; heat from pavements; salt/deicing chemicals; etc.)

Any planting strip less than 5 feet wide is in my opinion not worth it; even 5 feet is too little where there is no home/property owner to groom it. It will just turn into a dirt patch - weed patch at best. Maybe the alternative ground covers would help, but I doubt it. It is also not wide enough for trees to thrive. Trees should have more room/width, and where that is not possible no trees should be planted on the strip. Where the space is tight it is better to just put the sidewalk right up against the street and plant some trees behind the sidewalk.

Dean Charter made the same point that a planting strip should be as wide as possible if you hope to plant trees and that often it is better to plant trees on inside edge of sidewalks instead. But even if it is too narrow for trees to survive, the planting strip serves an important role as a utility strip - primarily as a place to dump snow from the sidewalk or street plow. We also do think that it improves safety even if it is just dirt or weeds. But I'm going to experiment with different ground covers this summer on some test planting strips (a neighbor has volunteered her "dirt patch") so maybe we'll be able to develop more concrete suggestions for low-maintenance management of narrow planting strips.

Curbing:

I agree that vertical or high profile curbs should be the standard, although it doesn't need to be always granite; there are some other decent concrete alternatives besides the standard bituminous cape cod berm. This is a cost issue, and a trade off - more miles with bituminous curb v. fewer miles with granite curb or some form of higher grade concrete curb. Bituminous concrete curb could be faced with brick or other color to create contrast where a sidewalk abuts the road. Low-reveal sidewalk curbs should never be built again especially where the sidewalk abuts the street.

I learned a new term "low-reveal sidewalk curbs", so thank you! Yes, it would be useful to consider alternatives that create the visual contrast but are less expensive than granite.

#### Mailboxes:

You should consider in your guidelines the placement of mailboxes where delivery by mail trucks is the norm.

We added mailboxes to the list of items which are often placed in the planting strip (p. 10). If there are more specific town guidelines on the placement of mailboxes, we could reference that.

#### Retrofitting existing street:

It is a big problem to get sidewalks done where there is insufficient right of way. One-way streets to reduce vehicle travel lane width and to make room for a decent sidewalk can be options. But, one-way proposals for various reasons and purposes have been rejected in the past. The guide should look at best practices for retrofitting streets with severe right-of-way limitations, or similar issues (grades, slopes, wetlands, etc).

Perhaps an issue for version two. It could be that the subject is too complicated to make general observations that are useful for the kind of streamlined guideline document we've put together. Our engineering department will be grappling with these issues as they consider the design for High Street and, later, for Taylor Rd.

#### Pervious pavements:

They don't seem to make sense along most Acton roads - runoff from the sidewalk surface is too small to cause any drainage problems. While it might help plantings in the buffer strip, there are trade-offs: higher installation costs, higher maintenance cost (power vac to remove sand) etc. It maybe more important to consider pervious sidewalk surfaces in densely built areas with little opportunity for water infiltration to support trees.

#### Landscaping:

Perhaps the guide should consider maintenance cost of some of the suggested planting methods. Rain gardens, for instance, are a fine idea. But I suspect they will need more maintenance than just in the first year.

Yes, you're probably right that I made the maintenance sound simpler than it is. I've adjusted the language a bit. Some of the planting suggestions are meant to encourage private home owners to consider alternatives to grass, so that they can choose to take on

the *different* kind of maintenance required for ground covers or shrubs rather than grass if they want to.

Regards -

Roland Bartl, AICP  
Planning Director  
472 Main Street  
Acton, MA 01720  
(978) 264-9636

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**From:** Kate Chung [mailto:[katewchung@yahoo.com](mailto:katewchung@yahoo.com)]

**Sent:** Saturday, January 16, 2010 3:10 PM

**To:** Commission on Disabilities; Conservation Commission; Design Review Board; Historic District Commission; Historical Commission; Planning Board; Recreation Commission; Transportation Advisory Committee; Community Preservation Committee

**Cc:** Sidewalk Committee

**Subject:** Sidewalk Guidelines for Town of Acton - please let us know your thoughts.

Hello everyone -

For the past year, the Sidewalk Committee has been developing a comprehensive set of sidewalk guidelines for both developers and town staff. The final draft is attached.

Before we officially send this to the Board of Selectmen for approval, we would like to solicit comments/suggestions from other Boards in town.

Please review the Guidelines and let us know if your board has any changes or suggestions for improvement. We would appreciate comments, if any, by February 5th. (If you can't meet this deadline please let us know.)

If you have any questions about the Guidelines, please feel free to contact Celia Kent, the Sidewalk Committee member who has coordinated the preparation of this document. Celia can be reached directly at [celia.kent@gmail.com](mailto:celia.kent@gmail.com).

If you prefer to discuss your comments with us in person, our next meeting is scheduled for February 10th at 7:00 pm.

Thanks in advance for your input.

Best regards,

Kate Chung

Sidewalk Committee Co-Chair